

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 4184

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV PINT NL

SUBJECT: JUSTICE MINISTER DECIDES

REF: THE HAGUE 3554

1. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER/JUSTICE MINISTER VAN AGT, CATHOLIC PEOPLE'S PARTY (KVP), HAS FINALLY DECIDED HE WILL NOT RESIGN IN RESPONSE TO THE BLOEMENHOVE AFFAIR (REFTEL). IN A LETTER TO THE SECOND CHAMBER, HE SAID THAT RESIGNATION WOULD NOT LEAD TO (TO HIM) DESIRABLE RESULTS AND THAT HE HAD CONCLUDED THAT BY STAYING ON HE WOULD BETTER BE ABLE TO EXERT INFLUENCE ON THE FURTHER TREATMENT OF THE ABORTION ISSUE.

2. VAN AGT'S DECISION HAS BEEN WELCOMED WITH A SIGH OF RELIEF ACROSS MOST OF THE DUTCH POLITICAL SPECTRUM. TO BE SURE, HIS THREAT TO RESIGN--AND THEREBY TO CAUSE A CABINET CRISIS--EARLY THIS SUMMER HAD BEGUN TO LOSE CREDIBILITY WITH TIME. WHEN HE FINALLY ANNOUNCED HIS DECISION, FEW WERE LEFT WHO CONTINUED TO BELIEVE THAT VAN AGT WOULD LET HIS CONSCIENCE TRIGGER A POLITICAL CRISIS. THE RELIEF IS NOT LEAST AMONG MEMBERS OF HIS OWN PARTY WHO HAVE BEEN DISTINCTLY UNCOMFORTABLE ALL ALONG TO FIND THAT THEIR MOST PROMINENT MEMBER OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT TURNED OUT TO HAVE A CAPACITY FOR HIGHLY UNUSUAL, IF NOT QUIXOTIC, POLITICAL BEHAVIOR. THROUGHOUT THE AFFAIR, VAN AGT--CONTRARY TO LONG-ESTABLISHED CUSTOM--DID NOT CONSULT WITH PARLIAMENTARY LEADER ANDRIESEN NOR OTHER MEMBERS OF THE KVP

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PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION AND EQUALLY KEPT HIS COALITION

PARTNERS IN THE DARK ABOUT HIS INTENTIONS, THEREBY LEAVING
MANY IN A STATE OF CONSIDERABLE UNCERTAINTY.

3. BECAUSE VAN AGT'S DECISION CAME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE
HOLIDAY PERIOD, WITH MANY LEADING POLITICIANS OUT OF THE
COUNTRY, REACTION HAS BEEN BOTH SLOW AND THIN. SUCH COMMENT AS
THERE HAS BEEN, HOWEVER, TENDS TO SUPPORT OUR ESTIMATE THAT ON
BALANCE VAN AGT HAS LOST CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL STATURE. THIS
IS A COMEDOWN, FOR AT THE BEGINNING OF THE AFFAIR VAN AGT'S
SEEMINGLY COURAGEOUS ATTEMPT TO TAKE ON A DIFFICULT ISSUE
RECEIVED LOYAL SUPPORT FROM WITHIN HIS OWN PARTY AND
COMMANDED CONSIDERABLE RESPECT AMONG A WIDE SPECTRUM OF
DUTCH WHO ADMIRE PERSONS WHO TAKE A STAND ON PRINCIPLE. AS
THE AFFAIR DRAGGED ON, HOWEVER, VAN AGT'S INDECISIVENESS LED
TO AN EROSION OF HIS SUPPORT AND HE ENDED UP LOOKING SILLY
IN MANY EYES. AS ONE COMMENTATOR OBSERVED, AMONG THE MANY
ILLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION NOT THE LEAST WAS THAT VAN AGT
SEEMED WILLING ALL ALONG TO BRING DOWN THE CABINET ON THIS ISSUE
THOUGH HE SHIED AWAY FROM THE RHUBARB WHICH WOULD HAVE RESULTED
IF HE HAD TRIED TO FORCE THE CLINIC TO CLOSE IN THE FACE OF A
DETERMINED GROUP OF WOMEN AND THEIR SUPPORTERS WHO AT ONE TIME
"OCCUPIED" THE CLINIC FOR A NUMBER OF DAYS TO BE SURE IT
REMAINED OPEN. WHILE THE EVENTUAL POLITICAL FALLOUT FOR VAN AGT
REMAINS TO BE MEASURED, HIS CHANCES OF BEING AT THE TOP OF THE
CDA ELECTORAL LIST (COMPRISING CANDIDATES OF THE THREE
CHRISTIAN PARTIES) NEXT SPRING HAVE ALL BUT VANISHED.

4. OF COURSE, WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN THE LAST CHAPTER OF THE
BLOEMENHOVE AFFAIR. IN A TV INTERVIEW FOLLOWING HIS DECISION,
VAN AGT INDICATED IT REMAINED CONCEIVABLE THAT THE CLINIC
MIGHT BE CLOSED BY SEIZURE OF THE EQUIPMENT AS THE RESULT
OF CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS CURRENTLY PENDING AGAINST SOME OF ITS
OFFICIALS. MOREOVER, THE SECOND CHAMBER IS SCHEDULED TO DEBATE
THIS FALL DRAFT LEGISLATION ON ABORTION AGREED UPON BETWEEN
THE SOCIALISTS AND THE LIBERAL (VVD) OPPOSITION. IF PUSH
COMES TO SHOVE, CATHOLIC JUSTICE MINISTER VAN AGT MIGHT REFUSE
TO SIGN SUCH LEGISLATION. THUS, PLENTY OF ROOM REMAINS FOR
FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS, NONE OF WHICH AT THIS JUNCTURE ARE
EASILY PREDICTABLE.

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